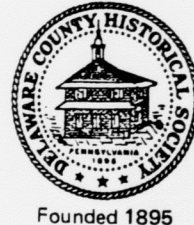


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BULLETIN



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Vol. 35, No. 2

September 1983

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR ? : The Rose Tree Fox Hunting Club

Sandy Bullock

For those of you who have had the pleasure of a summer's evening 1 1/2 miles north of Media, on Providence Road, at the many events of the Rose Tree Park Summer Festival, reflect about these following lines the next time you sit on the grass on the dell and listen to the music and the beat of these times.

There was another music and another beat which pervaded this same countryside beginning in 1859 and ending in 1964.

The music - a brass horn in the hands of the Master of the Hounds. The beat - the pulsating rhythms of the fox hunting hounds rallying at the feet of the 'nervous to get-going' horses of the oldest Hunt Club in America.

The Rose Tree Fox Hunting Club was formed formally in 1859, chartered in 1873, and incorporated in 1881. Named for the inn and tavern where the meetings were held, and where the hounds were kept and bred, the club had its beginnings with local farmers, who originally kept both their own hounds and horses.

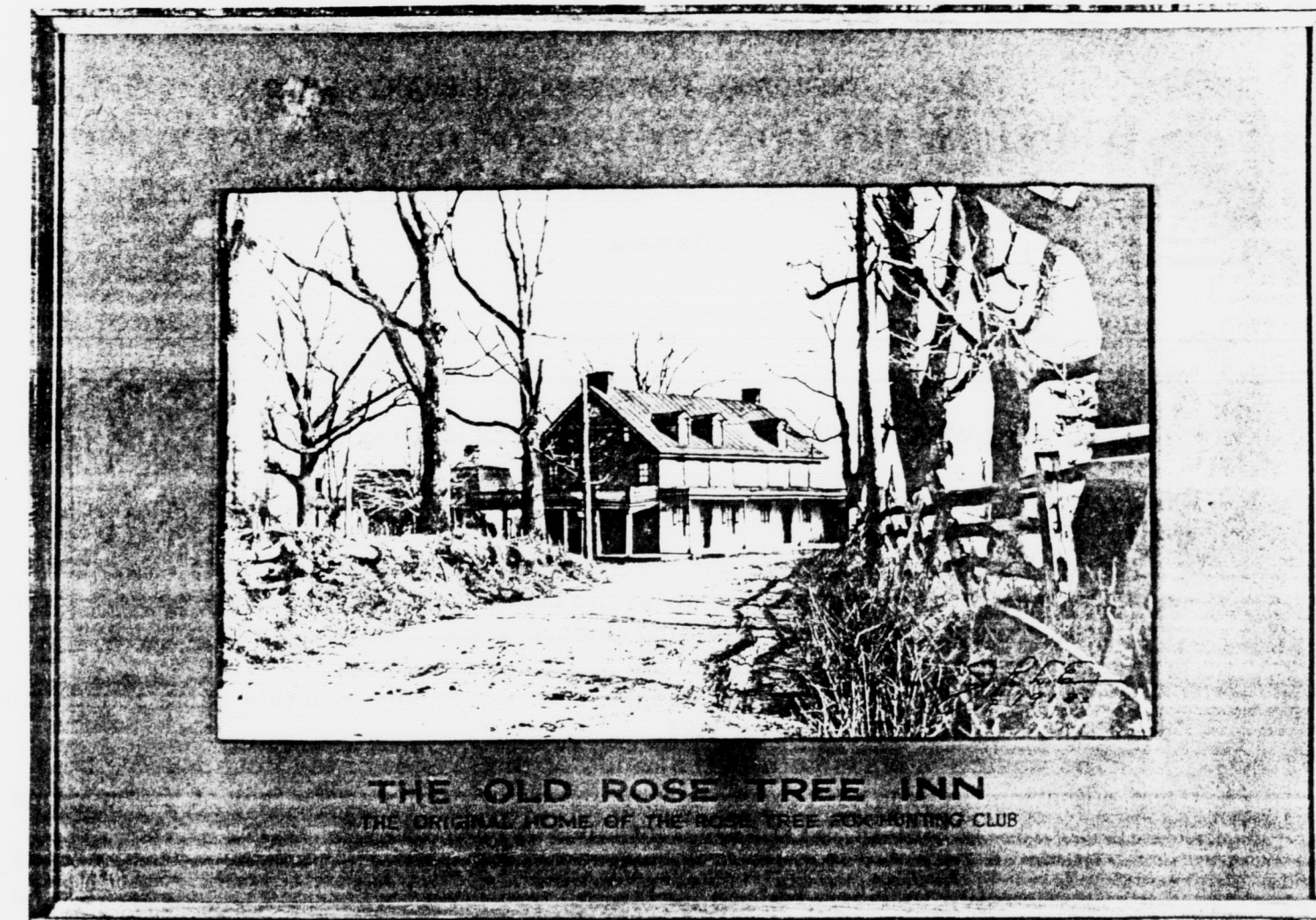
As the organization grew, the hounds were boarded at notable inns of the time, such as Rose Tree, Lamb's Tavern, Thomas McClures farm, and the Black Horse Inn in Middletown. In 1872 the Rose Tree was brought by Messrs. J. Howard Lewis, Samuel Lewis, Professor Fairman Rogers, and E. Farnum. The hounds were brought once again from "The Lamb" and along with them as Master came the former keeper of "The Lamb," Benjamin "Benny" Rogers.

Chester and Delaware Counties were fair hills and wide open for the chase. The chase was for the sport and not so much for the kill as it was by our forefathers in England. The hounds are trained to follow only the scent of the fox, and no other scent. Local farmers would vie for the fastest horse; this culminated with the Race Track being built for timber-jumps, steeple-chases, and flat races, all of which were limited to non-professionals.

The 2 1/2 mile track was built from 1906 - 1908 with the aid of Belgian draft horses especially imported by Samuel Riddle to level the track. The track is a dumbbell shaped ring situated where the paved walk above the amphitheatre is located today. Previously, races were held across Providence Road where Rose Tree Villages and the school now stand.

The largest crowd attended in 1920, when Samuel Riddle displayed his own horse, Man O'War. For this event 15,000 guests crowded the field.

The Hunt Club grew in the beginning and outsized the Rose Tree Inn, so a Hunt cottage was built in 1881, just east of the 1796 stone tavern, to be used as a clubhouse. Later, the lovely stone farmhouse behind the Tavern was purchased from William Bullock and became the permanent club house in 1906.



ROSE TREE INN, UPPER PROVIDENCE TOWNSHIP, N. E. CORNER OF
PROVIDENCE AND ROSE TREE ROADS
Photograph inscribed, lower right : "J. R. L. E 1918"

By 1877 the club had 31 active members and 14 contributing members. Membership was confined to Delaware and Chester Counties and Philadelphia.

Until 1895 traditional riding dress was a scarlet (pink) coat and waistcoat, riding breeches, high silk hat, top boots, and a riding crop. Later, dress was of pinks or black melton, topped with brown velvet collar with canary yellow piping.

Prestigious members included Samuel D. Riddle, William M. Jeffords, and William duPont, Jr.

For over 100 years local residents would hear the distant wail of the hunter's horn, and then the quiet, until the shireking and barking of the hounds in the chase and the thundering hoofbeats would echo the sound through many a thicket.

Then civilization of another sort took over. Farms were sold and developed as Delaware County industrialized, and less open country was available to hunt on - so, sadly, in 1964 Rose Tree had the last meet and the hunter's horn and the howling hounds and dashing horses all removed to York County.

Sad, too, for one Jesse Russel, who chose to be buried upright in full regalia on his property, Hunting Hills Farms, which is now in Ridley Creek State Park, just so he could hear the sounds of the horses and the hounds as they rode over the countryside.

So listen, dear friends, and maybe you'll hear